

so i've begun — slowly, because
i'm only learning how —
to flirt with them.

BUT IRISH, ALSO

i read in andrea lee's review
of i, fellini in the new yorker:

" ... the concerns behind his art were profoundly italian: the contrast between the morality preached by the catholic church and the pleasures of the flesh, linked, if only imaginatively, to a pagan past: the profound nostalgia for a recently vanished way of life; the obsessive desire for and fear of women, who are characterized with precision as either whores or good wives: the search for individual honor in a world of compromise and equivocation."

for years i've quipped to gene dinielli
that i've always wanted to be an italian.
suddenly i discover that
i always was.

ON A WING AND A PRAYER

never fly the american beagle unless you desire
the thrill of true flight.
the aircraft has a capacity of twenty passengers.
every seat is a window seat and every seat
is an aisle seat. almost on your hands
and knees, as if in a submarine, you squeeze
your way up what calls itself an aisle. you
do not carry your carry-on luggage on the
plane — you leave it at the boarding ladder
and someone stuffs it in a hollow in the
side of the fusilage. there are no restrooms
and no flight attendants, so of course there
are no cocktails, although alcohol has never
been more desperately needed. a recording
tells you where the safety gear is stored,
and it may be the first time you have ever
paid attention, but you can't hear them
out because the turbo props have begun
warming up. all the passengers are laughing,
but it is the laughter of a theatre audience
premiering dr. strangelove. above stockton the

plane begins to etch tight circles and the pilot announces it will be a while before the san jose traffic controllers can "sequence" you into a landing pattern. a breeze arrives off the sierra. it slams the aircraft sideways and drops you a few fathoms beneath your stomach. eventually you do hit the runway. you are not the proverbial ton of bricks, but the runway is. passengers are already pencilling in appointments with their chiropractors.

you suggest that what the flight needs is a chaplain.

you have never had a more appreciative audience.

THERE IS STILL BEAUTY IN OUR WORLD

like most things that are good for you, racking up one's laps at the ymca pool is just the matter of getting oneself there and into the water in the first place, easing into the groove of a stroke, and then enjoying one's virtue for what remains of the day afterwards. a bonus, though, is the lifeguards in their two-piece bathing suits. most of them are junior college girls who have been on swim teams or are still swimming competitively. in other words, they're all, in their splendidly different ways, good-looking. their sunbleached hair and tans don't hurt their appearances either. because i swim a lot of sidestroke, always facing their chairs, i get a pretty good, casual view of them, without any need to ogle, as i coast up and down the chlorine.

i never flirt with them
and, not surprisingly,
they never flirt with me.
but when spoken to,
they are invariably polite and pleasant.

although they are much better looking than most movie stars or, certainly, what you would find in a topless bar, it's really not a matter of sexual arousal at all: it's much more analogous to that aesthetic contemplation of beauty, that stasis, that stephen daedalus experienced